

# Birth of a National Park

By Freeman Tilden

*The article excerpted here was first published in the April-June 1945 issue of National Parks Magazine. Freeman Tilden (1883-1980) was a novelist and playwright. In the early 1940s, Tilden "tired" of writing fiction, and with the encouragement of Director Newton B. Drury, began to write about the national parks. The National Parks: What They Mean to You and Me was first published in 1951. Other works include The State Parks, Following the Frontier, and Interpreting Our Heritage. The article below provides a glimpse of Big Bend at a time when it had been a national park for only a year, and one man's view of its future.*

In a statutory sense, Big Bend, in southern Texas, is the newest of our national parks. But in a very real sense, it is a national park just coming slowly into existence.

To representatives of a national periodical with whom I spent some days recently in Big Bend, I casually mentioned my thought that we were enjoying a grand adventure, never to be repeated. To my delight, they caught the idea, and gaily enlarged upon it. Both said, "We see what you mean. It will never again be quite what it is at this moment. We are pioneering backwards."

The problem, as every conservationist realizes, is not so much what to develop, as how and where to prevent development; not rashly to introduce any kind of animal or plantlife, but to try to restore the conditions under which the delicate biotic balance may again assert itself.

Consequently, in this article, I shall venture to say some things about Big Bend National Park that have to do with the attainment of those objectives that are associated with all such areas.

Big Bend, roughly resembling a triangle, is bounded on two sides by running water—the Rio Grande. Elsewhere in the park, water sources are meager. It is a long distance from the river to the country adjacent to the Chisos Mountains, a fact that may necessitate careful consideration being given to the locating of visitor accommodations. The limited supply of water from springs will have to be shared with wildlife. Furthermore, this will have to be done in such a way that the animals will not have to come too close to the camps. All such considerations, of course, are having their influence upon the making of the master plans for the park.

Is it better to accept an already scarred and disfigured spot, and place "developments" there, even though it is not the best place for them? Or should you try to induce the restoration of natural beauty there—which might take a century—and instead, scar a now undisturbed, unblemished spot? Next we come to the problem of roads. What kind of roads do we want, and how many and where? Access roads there must certainly be, whether they disturb the eye or not.

The dilemma of roads will always be a matter for intelligent compromise, no doubt. At one extreme are those who would have no roads, only trails. At the other are the ardent modernists who think a road should be built to every scenic point. Undeniably, the young and vigorous, or even the older and vigorous, are the lucky people in any of our national parks, for they can hike, pack, and climb to the choice hidden places where roadways are out of the question. Is it unfair? Of course; but so are a lot of things in this world.

Fortunately, those who stand between the extremes are agreed that surfaced roads should be held to just that point that will allow adequate facility for the average person to see some of the beauties and marvels of the park areas. Even if the manner of this statement is not too good, I think there will be no great quarrel with the spirit.

Finally, I wish to offer my opinion, just as a private visitor, that although the old saying that "he who travels must be prepared to take away only as much as he brings with him" applies to all our great parks, it holds true especially of Big Bend.

## What Can Kids Do Here?



### Become a Junior Ranger!

Learn desert secrets, identify the parts of a cactus, and discover what javelina eat!

The Big Bend Junior Ranger program is designed for kids of all ages. Through activities, games, and puzzles, kids can have fun as they learn about the park. They can also earn stickers, badges, patches, and certificates.



The Junior Ranger Activity Book costs \$2.00 and is available at all park visitor centers.

### Hike a Trail!

Many park trails are suitable for families. Consult the "Easy and Moderate Hikes" chart on page 9. For children in strollers, consider the Window View Trail, a paved ¼-mile loop trail that begins at the Chisos Basin trailhead.

Big Bend is a special place! We hope you enjoy Big Bend National Park and that you learn to value its resources. If you have any questions, ask a park ranger for help.

## Where's All The Wildlife?

"HEY RANGER, WE'VE BEEN DRIVING ALL DAY AND HAVEN'T SEEN ANY ANIMALS. DOES ANYTHING live here?" These questions may have crossed your mind too. You may be surprised to learn that over 3,000 different kinds of animals inhabit Big Bend National Park. While the vast majority of these are invertebrates, over 600 species of vertebrates are also known here.

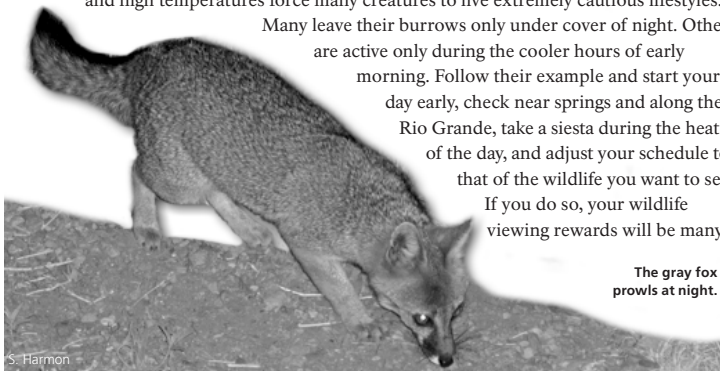
Common invertebrates include tarantulas, wolf spiders, centipedes, millipedes, scorpions, sunspiders, grasshoppers, walking sticks, velvet ants, harvester ants, and mites. Many are active only after summer rains, while others like the grasshoppers and cicadas may be heard singing throughout the heat of the day.

Vertebrates are most popular with park visitors since they include deer, javelina, black bears, and America's favorite watchable wildlife - *the birds*. Checklists of the park's birds, mammals, reptiles, and invertebrates are available at park visitor centers. Researchers have identified over 39 species of fish, 75 species of mammals, 11 amphibians, and 56 reptiles. Big Bend's bird checklist contains 450 species, the largest diversity of birds to be found in any U.S. national park.

The desert landscape may seem completely uninhabited, but the desert is full of surprises. Those who take the time to get out of their car and investigate, will discover abundant evidence of the desert's denizens. Holes, tracks, nests, and droppings are everywhere. Lizards dart by at amazing speed. Listen for the tinkling notes of the black throated sparrow, or the raspy song of the cactus wren. Keep in mind that in desert areas like Big Bend, low rainfall and high temperatures force many creatures to live extremely cautious lifestyles.

Many leave their burrows only under cover of night. Others are active only during the cooler hours of early morning. Follow their example and start your day early, check near springs and along the Rio Grande, take a siesta during the heat of the day, and adjust your schedule to that of the wildlife you want to see.

If you do so, your wildlife viewing rewards will be many.



S. Harmon

## "Desert Tracks"

Desert dramas are revealed in sand and soft soil. To see an animal, both you and it must be in the same place at the same time; but tracks may last for days. Below are some commonly seen Big Bend tracks.

Roadrunner



Coyote



Javelina



Lizard

